

THE MEASURE

A JOURNAL OF POETRY



John Weathervane, by Walter Hendricks — — — —
 Sonnets, by Harold Vinal — — — — — — — —
 Hired Jim, by Mary Blackburn — — — — — — — —
A Leprecaun in Indianapolis — — — — — — — —
 \$2.50 by the Year — — — — — — — — Single Copies 25c
 Editorial Office — — 223 West 15th Street, New York, N. Y.
 Published Monthly — — — — — — — — Cornwall, N. Y.
 Number 54- — — — — — — — — — — August, 1925

Entered as second-class matter February 4, 1924, at the post office at Cornwall, N. Y., under the Act of March 3, 1876

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John Weathervane

IN all the talked of town of Hurricane,
No man is so renowned as Weathervane.
He knows not only all the latest news,
But all the vast variety of views.

Whatever chance opinion be about,
John Weathervane is sure to find it out;
And, found, will freely pass from ear to ear—
Unlike the stupid, iron chanticleer.

He holds no fixed opinion of his own,
Except the one the latest wind has blown:
And if demand require pointing double,
He can oblige without the slightest trouble.

Whatever else, he is not partisan!—
In all respects a perfect gentleman.

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In a Fish Store

HERE in arrest is a world full of motion,
Caught from the lakes, or brought from the ocean:
Fish that have swum over corally strands,
Finned their way strangely by mystical lands. . . .

Filmy eye, fishy eye, what have you seen?
Watery lightning, O, where have you been?
Isn't it silly how stilly you lie!
Isn't it odd to be kippered and dry!

Church

WHERE temple walls and ceiling met,
A spider spun his silken net;
And from his seat, each Sabbath day,
He saw all those who came to pray.

He heard the ranting of the parson
Haranguing on a theme of arson,
Describing God in brimstone terms,
And designating men as worms.

(It seemed that God was like the one
Who came when services were done
With brushes, mops, and many brooms
To clean the now deserted rooms—

One whom the spider eyed with awe,
Whose broom was his consummate law!)

Walter Hendricks

Thorn and Weed

HERE thrive, in brambled darkness, thorn and weed,
These being people dwarfed and narrow-eyed
Who view the world, but only from one side,
And whimper in the wind and go to seed.
God knows their foreheads wear no sudden light!—
God's hand is hardly on them anytime.
They are poor sluggards in a pantomime,
Anonymous, pale children of the night.

Yet here a rose throve like a pure mind
Among them, throve but only to its shame. . . .
Beauty is still a legend to the blind:
There is no golden writing on the sky.
There are too many sluggards in the game—
And not a king in heaven to pattern by.

Pantomime

SINCE we are actors in a pantomime
Too complex for our heads to understand,
Pulled to and fro by energy and time,
This way and that as by a master hand;
Since we do little better than transcend
The melancholy monkey on his string,
Doffing his silly hat, we must pretend
That we are pleased with just this sort of thing.

The stigma is upon us all the same,
And we must caper for the great Unseen,
The leader and ringmaster in the game,
Altho our heads await the guillotine.
We tread our sawdust ring, brunette and clown,—
And very soon the curtain will ring down!

Harold Vinal

Life

LIFE is the organ grinder,
I am the monkey.
Often I creep into a corner and cry
And say: I will run away.
But I never I do.

The days go by with the same old jangle of tunes
In exact repetition,
With the little tricks
So ignoble and unoriginal:
There are the collar and chain,
And the jerks which bring
From the crowd claps and laughs;
The bright plumed hat for the world
And the little red coat with the gold braid
And the pocket for the pennies.

But when you're alone, blows and curses
And straw to sleep on.

Jean Adams

Elegy for a Young Girl

RANK hill grass is cool
For a girl's slim feet;
The wind's rush kinder
Than a city street.

She shall lay her head
In this bosky place—
A drift of shadows
Across her white face.

Here no sound shall turn
Darkened grass apart;
Not even the flutter
Of a girl's heart.

Anne Mary Secombe

A Practical Soul

WHAT does he see in his engines?
Poetry—or money?

I think I see the poetry of engines,
But I see poetry in everything.

And he—if I say

“Lift me up to the little new Moon!

I want to feel the point of it

Thru the hole in my shoe.”

He says:

“Why don’t you get some new ones?”

If I told him (I never shall)

“I like feeling the sidewalk thru the hole

Like a frozen penny pressed on my foot.”

He would say,

“You’ll catch your death of cold.”

Cow’s Ears

ISAW the sun thru a cow’s ears,—

The cow lay warm in the sun:

The cow knew only the slow warmth,

She knew not even the sun.

I knew the joy of the color

Of the cow’s ears in the sun,

Blood-red, but clear and glowing

Like red silk curled by the sun.

The one beside me walking

Was blinded by the sun:

He missed the subtle beauty

Of a cow’s ears in the sun.

Gladys Cosand

Tropic Waters

TWILIGHT is gliding down the threads of rain,
Which on the asphalt sprinkles beauty plain:
For yellow leaves are plastering the walk;
And like a shower of pebbles made of chalk,
Rain-drops are splattering in foamy dance
Till all the air is sown with sibilance. . . .
Like phosphorous the pelted pavements smoke.
Drain-pipes disgorge and gurgle. . . Gutters choke
With swollen torrents running veined with light
And minting snaky silver in the night. . . .
Beyond, the asphalt roadway seems to sleep
Like oily tropic waters, in whose deep
A golden fluid wavers slowly down
From sunken globes, like fuming moons that drown.
Or else reflections, quivering below,
Are prisoned gold-fish, struggling to and fro,
Squirming about within the glossy jet
And flashing in the dark as in a net!

Louis Ginsberg

Song Has Wings

EACH evening with the dishes in the rack,
And quiet stealing thru the glint and gloom,
She dried her hands and stole out of the room—
Out to the tired fence that faced the track
Of road that ran away between two fields.
Silas was gone. . . . he always went at night. . .
And God knows where. His bins held frugal yields.
Now she was left alone to cry for light.

But always down the fields, when day-fall waned,
A violin's slow tremulo spun free,
Stirring the wistful song that still remained
To overflow her bosom's misery. . . .
One night when Silas slouched home mouthing things
His wife was gone. Men say that song has wings.

Howard McKinley Corning

Tag!

THE picture thru the river water
To a fish who glides below,
Of a gaunt blue craning heron,
Is a mystery to know.
To him the heron is a shadow
Of a broken dark blue snag;
But the heron up above him
Plays a conscious game of tag:
After one single throbbing heart-beat
The blue heron will have won—
The fish will be "It," and eaten
By the heron in the sun.

Hired Jim

PHOEBE Polk strode early to the wind-racked wood;
She wore a blue jacket and an old black hood.
Thru the jagged timber seeped the daylight dim;
Sugar-water dribbled over each pail's brim.
 "Tom and me are gettin' old,"
 She shivered and she gibbered
 To herself in the cold.

They boiled the syrup amber; they worked all night;
The sap had stopped running when dark bloomed light.
"The syrup season's over," said Tom's hired Jim,
"Now the sap don't dribble over each pail's brim.
 Tom, I calculate," said he,
 "A jag of hay, as part pay,
 Will make it right with me."

Hiding in the hayloft, Phoebe heard this:
"I'll gather up a-plenty they'll never miss. . . .
Tom is easy-goin' like, ain't scared of him;
And Phoebe's at the sugar-house," chuckled hired Jim.
 (Underneath Jim's load of hay
 Boards, grain, a hitching-chain,
 And fork were stowed away.)

"You good for nothin' frothy scum!" Phoebe said low. . . .
And what became of hired Jim, you'll never know.
But next sugar season, they couldn't find Jim
When maple sap dribbled over each pail's brim!

Mary Blackburn

The Measure & A Journal of Poetry

Published monthly by the Editors at 223 West 15th St., New York

Edited by Léonie Adams, Joseph Auslander, Louise Bogan, Padraic Colum, Rolfe Humphries, George O'Neil, E. Merrill Root, Pitts Sanborn, Genevieve Taggard. From these nine an acting editor and an assistant are elected quarterly by the board.

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A Leprecaun in Indianapolis

IRELAND until very recently has been known for two things: literature and trouble.

I do not intend to write about the trouble. Rather I wish to write about the literature as it has recently visited these states in the person of that splendid little Irishman, James Stephens. I had the good fortune to hear James Stephens read his own poetry in Indianapolis, and I may say this at once: if you are starving to death and have only money enough either to get a good meal or to hear James Stephens, don't get the good meal.

Physically, James Stephens proved to be a little gnome of a man. His head was bald in the centre like the head of an adjutant crane. His face recalled the words that the women of Florence once whispered to each other when they saw a much greater poet wandering in their streets—"Lo, there goes the man who has been in Hell!" Amid the comfortable faces of American men or the uncomfortable faces of fashionable American women, Stephens looked strange and elfin. A Leprecaun in Indianapolis!

He has, of course, suffered. And that is why his poetry and his poetic prose are real. His early life, as he told it to a friend of mine in Dublin, was harsh and sad. Once, in his own words, "I was so

hungry that the world seemed one big belly, and I was it." Again, he had spent a cold and hungry night on a Dublin park bench, and was expecting also a cold and hungry day. But in the twilight of the dawn he noticed a movement at the lake's edge; looking closer, he saw that it was a swan. The swan was nibbling at something—a half loaf of bread floating on the water. Jumping up, Stephens rushed into the lake (perhaps up to his neck, for he is a little man), fought the swan for a breakfast, and won a good meal—or what was a good meal to him then—of soggy but delicious bread. And once in Belfast (daunted, perhaps, by the austere dismal ugliness of that resolutely Protestant city), he climbed upon the parapet of a bridge and jumped off into the water. But then (in his own words): "The water was so damned cold, I climbed right out again."

When he spoke in Indianapolis, one forgot everything but the wit and music of his speech. He talked quite like "The Crock of Gold," with a sly insinuating humor, as when he said that from the older Gaellic poets he always "stole delicately"; or that "In Ireland, Jehovah and McCarthy are synonymous"; or that in a certain poem an Irish poet was "busily and fervently thanking God that his girl had said 'no.'" His humor was particularly delightful. I shall not soon forget the story he told of one of the older Gaellic poets. In ancient times (Stephens said), Ireland was a paradise for poets: if a poet wished anything, he simply took what he desired, without money and without price: if he wanted a glass of beer, all he had to do was to walk into a pub and take it; if he was so foolish as to want a collar, all he had to do was to walk into a shop and get it. But the wars of Cromwell came upon Ireland and impoverished the people and made them stingy. The first to discover this change was the old Gaellic poet of whom I spoke. He walked into a pub and asked for a glass of beer. The bar-maid (who seems to have had the pertness and athletic ability of a modern flapper) said, "Where's your money?" "I haven't any: I am a poet!" Thereupon the young woman took him by the shoulders, walked him to the door, and with one shove sent him across the road into the ditch. You or I, not being poets, would have picked ourselves up, brushed our clothes, adjusted our broken bones, and walked off to institute a suit for assault and battery. But he, being a poet, did not. He sat (or perhaps lay) in his ditch, and gazed across at the bar-maid in the door, and composed a poem. The poem (which Alas! I cannot

quote in full) was one of the most beautiful bits of slanging I have ever heard. He described the young woman; he called all the most picturesque curses of heaven upon her; and he ended by hoping that she would marry a ghost, and have a kitten instead of a child, and die of the mange!

James Stephens' own poetry reminded me of such a strange esthetic combination as gargoyles from a French cathedral in the midst of a rose garden. Wit, thought now whimsical and now delightfully almost mad, a swift fancy wheeling like a swallow, and beyond and behind all the charming spontaneous sincerity of a child: such were its qualities. It is conventional—and true tho misleading—to say that Stephens is not so great a poet in his verse as in his prose, which is like saying that (in the "Crock of Gold") Pan is not so beautiful as Angus Og. If the Gods are greatest, we do not often find even demigods. And most of those who say that Stephens' verse is not so great as his prose are unworthy even to tie the latchet of Stephens' shoe. Certainly in his poetry as well as in his prose, we realize that here is an elf from fairy-haunted Ireland who climbed into a human cradle.

I had not known Stephens' poetry when I had merely read it. True, I had always delighted in such poems as "The Snare," with its beautiful love for all life under every disguise of feathers or of fur, and its sensuous beauty which is truth, as when the poet describes the rabbit—

"Making everything afraid,
Wrinkling up his little face"

I had always liked the delicate humor and the musical fancies of "The Goat Paths," wherein the bearded solemn goats wander in their "sunny quietness" and if an alien comes "make an angry sound," until the poet, charmed by their philosophic goatish drollery, wishes that he too were an Irish goat and could stray with them amid the heather. . . .

"If I were as wise as they
I would stray apart and brood,
I would beat a hidden way
Thru the quiet heather spray
To a sunny solitude;
And should you come, I'd run away,
I would make an angry sound,
I would stare and turn and bound
To the deeper quietude,
To the place where nothing stirs
In the stillness of the furze

I would think until I found
Something I can never find,
Something lying on the ground
In the bottom of my mind."

And I had liked many other poems, as tiny yet as precious as the Leprecauns' own Crock of Gold.

But when I heard Stephens read (or rather recite) his poems, they flowed still more like native wood-notes wild. Their natural music was interpreted and enhanced by his voice. Many of the poems he chanted, or even sang. And between poems he told us their origin or meaning: poetry to the running accompaniment of prose wit and wisdom. He told us how he had striven to capture the rhythms of life: the dip and sway of the June rose in the breeze; the swish and hurl of the mid-Atlantic wave; the silent circling of the moon. He said that a poem, if it was a poem and not verse, grew strangely from the subconscious; consequently he never knew, at the time he wrote it, what it meant. When he reread his poem after the hot chaos of creation had cooled into a cosmos, the second line was always a great surprise to him. Thus Death, he found long after he had written a poem about it, meant a slowing of the rhythm and an intensification of the energy of life. And if we should go to the poets—to Whitman, to Keats, to Shapkespeare—and read their most unconscious poetry about Death, we should learn the truth about it. (Or is Mr. Mencken right, and poetry merely star-spangled lying?)

Stephens' poems were simple, brief, always at least pretty, and often beautiful. They charmed me personally because they were not realistic and intellectual, but mystical and romantic. They were not the brittle, brain-spun, clever-clever stuff of so many moderns—of T. S. Elliot, or of Richard Aldington, or of Ezra Pound—that passionless professor with a taste for chaste words and the unhappy delusion that he is the Jesus Christ of poetry. Their humor was not mere phosphorescent brains. I felt that perhaps the best way to praise Stephens' poetry is to say that one would not expect to find it in *The Dial*. I judged that he values mere intellectuality about as highly as Schopenhauer did or as life does. He does not try to be "hard and clear" like a cameo or a fossil, but soft and mystical like a girl or a monkey.

His was the poetry of life translated into Irish. He brought us the quiet grey twilight in an Irish village; the beauty of a gull's

feather drifting amid foam, and of all lonely things; the wistful ugliness of the Dublin cabby and his poor old horse which "might have been you by a different end"; the green, terrible, "hushing" beauty of the wave; the windy joy of the bird singing that his mate has "an egg, egg, egg." To hear his poetry was indeed to find in a "world grown old and cold and dreary" new "casements opening on the foam of perilous seas in faery-lands forlorn."

I knew, to be sure, that this Leprecaun in Indianapolis did not possess the Keats-like quality of our greatest contemporary poet, Ralph Hodgson; that he did not attain the poignant perfection of A. E. Housman; that he did not have the wide energy of Masfield (at his early best), nor quite the lyric loveliness of W. H. Davies. I knew, also, that he had put more of himself into the romantic prose of "The Demigods" and "The Crock of Gold" than into his poetry. But I also knew more surely than ever before that he was a poet—one of the few authentic poets of our day: a man who has overheard the rhythms of life and has translated many of them into Irish. And I was very happy that there are no immigration laws against faeries from the green hills.

Ireland without James Stephens would be like the Leprecauns without their pot of gold—"like a rose without a perfume, a bird without a wing, or an inside without an outside"!

E. Merrill Root

The Holy Yea

MENCKEN once made the sapient remark that the "Liberator" was the best magazine in America.

Mencken is not often so fortunate as to agree with me, but this time he almost was. With the exception of "Pearson's" in the great days of Frank Harris, the "Liberator" *was* the best magazine in America. And the reason has significance for poets.

The "Liberator" had what some people call a faith, and what we should better call a philosophy. It had a certain definite belief about human life; in expressing this belief it was brilliantly pugnacious and vitally artistic. Now most of us—especially American poets—are like travellers trying to reach Rome by playing blind-man's-buff. We are eagles trying to soar in a vacuum. We like to call ourselves grand-children of Whitman, and we are only petty-children. And why? Simply because we, unlike him, have not enough creative vigor to make a definite faith or philosophy. Mencken is interesting because he has at least a faith in scepticism. We are uninteresting because we don't have a faith in anything but our own ability to write poetry. We are poets for Poetry's sake. And that is to commit poetic suicide.

Poetry magazines are as insipid as sponges, and full of contemporary verse which is contemptable verse. The reason? Because they talk so much about Poetry, and have so little sense for Life. The great Renaissance needed in America is not a New Poetry but a New Life. We need a holy Yea and Nay.

Our esthetic emphasis produces Poetry Magazines. A vital emphasis produced the "Masses" and the "Liberator." A man with any sense for true art would not hesitate between the two kinds of magazine even for the space it takes to crack a peanut: he would say that the "Masses" and the "Liberator" were far better, even esthetically, than the albino Poetry Magazines. Are there no poets in America who are vital and not esthetic? If so, they seldom reach the editors. Or is there many a rejection slip 'twixt the Poet and his public?

What I personally want (and seldom get) is poetry that is life. I believe that if a poet attains creative life, all the other things shall

be added unto him; and that if he doesn't have creative life, it doesn't do him any good to snip-snap intellectually and esthetically or to hang from trees by the prehensile tail of his fancy.

"For creating, a holy Yea and Nay is needed, Oh my brethren!"

E. M. R.

Contributors

WALTER Hendricks is a graduate of Amherst college in the Meiklejohn years, a friend of Robert Frost's, and a poet who is not yet so well known as he will be. He teaches in Chicago, and spends his summers in Franconia, New Hampshire.

Harold Vinal is too well known to lovers of poetry (and therefore to readers of *The Measure*) to need introduction now.

Jean Adams lives in Ardsley, New York, and writes musical and colorful free verse.

Anne Mary Secombe writes poetry even in Boston, Massachusetts.

Gladys Cosand is a young poet of charming fancy and feeling. She is a teacher in Oakwood School, New York.

Howard McKinley Corning lives in Portland, Oregon—too far for an ignorant editor to receive biographical data before *The Measure* goes to press. Of this I am sure: he is a poet.

Louis Ginsberg writes from Newark, New Jersey. He has recently appeared in "The Independent Poetry Anthology," and in *The Forum, Contemporary Verse*, etc. He has published a volume, "The Attic of the Past." One of his poems will appear in Untermeyer's revised "Modern American Poetry" in the fall.

Mary E. Blackburn inhabits Ohio. Her writing has the easy magic of natural poetry.

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Publication Office at Cornwall, N. Y.

Editorial Office at 223 West Fifteenth Street, New York City

Subscription \$2.50 a year

Single Copies 25 cents

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